

REMINISCENCES OF AN AMATEUR LEPIDOPTERIST 1920-90

E.P. WILTSHIRE

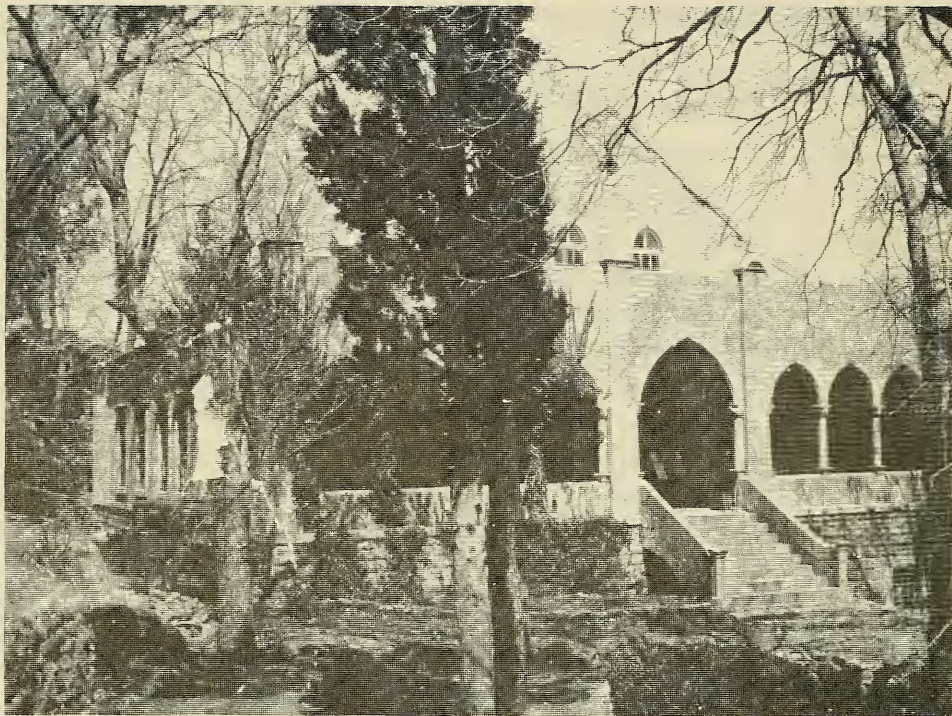
*Wychwood, High Road, Cookham Rise, Berks SL6 9JF.**(Continued from page 68)*

BEIRUT itself, for the capital of a state, was surprisingly good in Lepidoptera. I lodged in suburbs on the high ground of west Beirut, not too far from the administrative centre where the Consulate then stood. This whole area was still undamaged by the later civil wars: a rich East Mediterranean fauna, even the odd *Charaxes jasius* (L.), could be collected right there, and was an eye-opener to one fresh from England. With my equipment and invaluable reference-books I could not resist breeding and catching what lay ready to hand, starting almost as soon as I arrived. In five minutes from my flat I could reach the American University, where it was my pleasant duty to study Arabic from Lebanese or Syrian teachers. There was no objection from the staff to my nocturnal visits to its grounds.

Founded in 1866 by an American Presbyterian Mission, it now consisted of over forty buildings, some very grand, built mostly of local limestone at three hundred feet above the sea, in a walled park, falling to sea level and green with unspoilt indigenous vegetation such as carob, terebinth, *Quercus coccifera* and *Calycotome villosa*, which burst into yellow flower a few months after my arrival. Rough roads ran down to a sports stadium at the foot of the cliffs, close to the sea where there was also access to bathing from rocks. Only this part was entomologically unattractive.

Years later, when I revisited Beirut in the fifties and sixties, I was disappointed in the habitat changes. Ras Beirut, the eastern cape with its "pigeon rocks", had ceased to be a wild cliff top where old tamarisks lined the winding roads: high-rise flats had been constructed on this choice spot. And the American University park's former quality of a miniature nature-reserve had been transformed, the green rocky slopes now being tame terraces where exotic, florid hibiscus trees lined asphalt walks for the students.

To return, however, to the thirties, in which I was lucky to see the city, and to learn at the University. A long summer vacation from late June to late September was taken by the university whose teaching staff, including my Arabic teachers, dispersed to their homes or lodgings in the mountain resorts away from the humid heat of the littoral. Two of them (in 1933) arranged to be at a wooded middle-height resort called Duhour Shweir, and my rival student Vice-Consul and I continued our lessons amid new and beautiful surroundings. We lodged at Cedar Lodge Hostel, constructed primarily for the benefit and recuperation of missionaries and their families who worked most of the year in less salubrious parts of the Middle East. It stood in an oak wood just east of the ridge where the main street of the resort lay.



Cedar Lodge Hotel, Duhour Shweir, Lebanon, 1933.

On the oaks were the huge lappet caterpillars of the Cos silk-moth, *Pachypasa otus* Drury, in fact the site teemed with all the denizens of the garigue woodlands of the Eastern Mediterranean area, the only nasty one being a giant species of centipede which occasionally attacked diners as they sat at the hostel tables.

One of our teachers, Costi Zuraik, a blue eyed and red haired Christian Arab from Damascus, lodged normally in a pension on the ridge at 4,000 feet: the other, called Antun Sa'ada, was an eccentric who had inherited a pine-clad sector of woods close to the hostel, and lived that summer in the top of one of these trees. We had to mount a ladder to hear his comments on our Arabic composition, and on a platform high up were a camp-bed, a folding table and a small book-shelf.

During Turkish rule, Antun's father had been banished from "Syria" for nationalist activities, and Antun's boyhood had been spent in Brazil. Only recently returned to his "homeland", he believed in the unity of a greater Syria than it enjoyed now under French mandate, and was an admirer of Mussolini. He often inveighed against the French, and also the Zionists: behind educational and literary activities he was already feeling his way towards political action.

Later he founded his own Pan-Syrian party, and became well-known, even idolised: but he was executed by Lebanese politicians in July 1949 (see Seale, 1985, chapter 8).

During my second year I had a car of my own and went further afield on short collecting trips: not only to Bsherreh as already mentioned, but Antioch, the Euphrates valley and Palmyra: in April 1934 the ruins of the latter, far out in the desert north of Damascus, were crawling with *Cryphia* caterpillars feeding on the orange lichens. This particular holiday trip was made with Bayard Dodge, his wife and sons, and another Vice-Consul. Dodge was the AUB President.



With Bayard Dodge and family, near Abu Kamal, Syria, 1934.

During my first two years in the Service, for photographing people or caterpillars, I had nothing better than an O Brownie box camera. For close-ups I propped a magnifying glass, stronger than the standard "portrait-attachment" between it and the object. Using these prints I published in the *Entomologist's Record* my first two "Early stages" articles in 1935 and 1936. But from August 1936, on the recommendations of Willy Tams of the British Museum (Natural History), I purchased a second-hand *Exakta* camera, and first used it on my canoe trips on the Tigris, and in the Rowanduz Gorge in Iraqi Kurdistan. I was posted to Iraq in May 1935.

References (part 4)

- Seale, P., 1965. *The struggle for Syria*, R.I.I.A., Oxford U.P.
Wiltshire, E.P., 1935. Some notes on the early stages of some Syrian lepidoptera. *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.*, **47**: (1) -(8) (Pl. 3).
Wiltshire, E.P., 1936. More notes on the early stages of Syrian lepidoptera. *Ibid*, **48**: (9)-(11).

5. Wider contacts

Our consul at Mosul, Jack Finch, was away for the summer of 1935 and I was *locum-tenens* there until October, when I would proceed to Baghdad. After leave in England I picked up a new car in Beirut, a 1935 Chevrolet, and drove solo via Deir-ez-Zor on the Euphrates and arrived at Mosul in three days. The greater part was over gravel or mud desert, and every day I saw many Painted Ladies (*Cynthia cardui* L.) migrating northwards; at night the large moth *Euxoa agricola* Bsd. was equally common on the wing from Deir-ez-Zor onwards.

I had just spent a three-month leave in England, partly at home in Gorleston and partly in London, where I left some Pug pupae from the Lebanon with Dr Cockayne, then resident in Westbourne Terrace and working in the Children's Hospital. The pupae hatched on 15th April and Cockayne consulted Louis B. Prout about them. The latter described them as *Eupithecia quercetica* n. sp. in Seitz 4, sup., p. 204 (1938).

Other contacts, made in London that leave, greatly influenced my subsequent entomological path. At the British Museum in South Kensington I was trying to identify the more difficult of my Lebanese moths when by coincidence Dr Bytinski Salz from Berlin was also consulting Willy Tams. Salz became quite excited about my moths and said he could get the problems identified by some of the latest European experts.

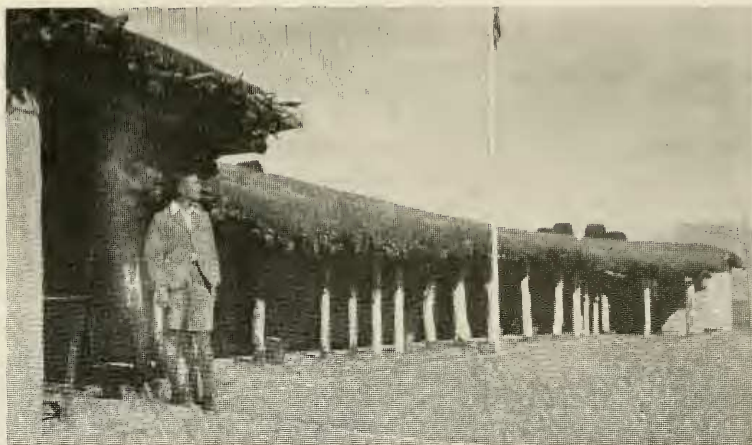
"Your *Cucullia* and *Athetis*" he assured me, "must certainly go to Boursin, the young expert of Trifid Noctuids in the Paris Museum; your *Procris* can only be identified by Dr Naufock at Linz; I myself will describe as new your form near *Nonagria geminipuncta* from Amik marsh; while your micros had better go to Dr Amsel at Bremen. He has collected in Palestine and just produced a great work on this group."

Consequently, soon after arriving in Mosul I heard from Charles Boursin that, among various Noctuids, he had been able to name for me, was a new "*Athetis*" taken at the Cedars of Bsherreh, which he proposed to call *hedychroa*. He suggested I might send him more "*Athetis*" if I found such around Mosul. This letter was the first of a long series of letters which continued until 1971. During this time he described more "*Athetis*" from Iraq and Iran but his own researches showed that *Athetis* was the wrong name for the genus. At first he used the name *Elaphria* instead, but later he and others settled that *Caradrina* was the best.

On arrival at Mosul I also learned that there was an unusual Vice-Consulate in Iraqi Kurdistan on the road from Erbil to Urumiya in N.W. Iran: the place was a village called Diana, where some Assyrians, once refugees from Turkish massacres, had settled. At the end of World War 1 these hardy mountain Christians of Eastern Turkey had trekked southwards and joined the British Indian expeditionary forces which had reached Baghdad and were fighting the Turks north of Mosul. It was eventually decided to enlist the able-bodied men as levies to guard our air-fields, etc, in Iraq; these people also provided staff for our two posts at Mosul and Diana, a part of Iraq where they felt more at home than at Baghdad.

The Vice-Consulate at Diana, a rather primitive structure, was now supervised from the Mosul Consulate, and as Acting Consul at the latter I had to visit Diana periodically.

Diana, near the provincial capital of Rowanduz, was closer than Rowanduz to the new road, but the expected trade with N.W. Iran did not progress as much as expected, and beyond calling on the various Iraqi authorities in the province there was little work for me up there, though out



Vice-Consulate, Diana, Iraq.

of curiosity I went past Diana and as far as Rayat and Haj Omran on the frontier.

This road from Erbil to Persia, the first “carriage” road in those parts, was then still known as the Hamilton road, having been recently constructed by a Scots engineer of that name. It could boast one or two bridges permitting cars and lorries to cross such rivers as the Rowanduz Chai, though to reach Erbil from Mosul I had to cross the Zab by ferry. After leaving the spectacular Rowanduz Gorge this small river joined the Zab after passing through parallel limestone ridges covered with small oak trees, a type of country which I found again further south-west in the Zagros chain in Western Persia. The gorge where I collected by night, from my base at Diana, also contained a huge cave where later important prehistoric finds were made. (For a view, see my 1937 article, Pl. 7; and for Hamilton’s account of making the road, see his 1937 book.)



Crossing the Zab river, Iraq.

I was also able to visit the Little Zab in the Amadia province, where one or two other Assyrian settlements existed, and there were also two or three villages of native Jews, though Kurds predominated. From Amadia I visited the mountain-top camp of Ser Amadia, which was a summer camp for British servicemen, a health refuge from camps in the hot plains such as Hinaidi near Baghdad. It was a brief visit, but my diary notes that a Captain Day sent me some more lepidoptera from Ser Amadia a few weeks later.

However, in October Jack Finch returned to Mosul and I drove down to Baghdad, where I lodged at the YMCA and joined the Alwiya club.

The YMCA had a boat-house on the Tigris east bank and its collapsible canoes enabled me to visit the banks and islands of that great river, where Euphrates poplar and tamarisks grew, and I started noting how the annual low water, or early summer floods, affected these rather precarious habitats. At the Alwiya club lights, among various moths, I took a female Noctuid which remained a unicum for many years thereafter. Boursin named it *Rhyacia rafidain*, an Arabic fancy name meaning "two rivers", though whether this species is found along the Euphrates remains to be seen; he also wrote to me about my moths which he named after me, and which I had caught at Rayat; both appeared in Seitz Vol. 3 supplement which was then coming out in parts.

Iraq, after about ten years under British mandate, had become independent only two years before I reached Baghdad, and the British-Indian link was still evident. Below the office of the editor of an English paper, 'The Iraq Times', was a bookshop where I found on sale a book, printed in Bombay, entitled "Fauna of Iraq". It was a collection of reprints published in 1921-2 by the Bombay Natural History Society, and dealt with birds, mammals, butterflies and moths. A colour plate accompanied Peile's article on the butterflies; it included diagnoses by Riley; further articles by Prout, Watkins, Buxton and Rothschild treated the moths.

The compact old city of Baghdad, until 1914 a provincial capital of the Turkish empire, was surrounded by extensive date-palm gardens, watered from the Tigris. During the thirties it started to expand, but the residential quarter, with the club, the YMCA and officials' houses, and the new hospital in the north, retained a garden-like aspect. The Swallow-tail (*Papilio machaon* (L.)) and the Plain Tiger (*Danaus chrysippus* (L.)) typified the temperate and tropical elements in the lepidoptera -fauna still flourishing in these gardens.

(To be continued)